President To Disclose 'Everything'

White House Disputes Walsh's Charges of Iran-Contra Coverup

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The White House promised yesterday to make public "everything" in President Bush's files to counter charges by independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh that the president was continuing a coverup of the Iran-contra affair when he pardoned former defense secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and five others Thursday.

White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater also said in a telephone interview yesterday that he would not comment on charges by Walsh, the Iran-contra special prosecutor, that Bush may have "illegally withheld documents" from his investigation.

But Fitzwater said Bush would make "everything" in his own files public, along with the transcript of the president's five-hour interrogation by the independent counsel's office in 1988, as soon as the transcript is returned to him by Walsh's aides.

In a bitter denunciation of Bush's Christmas Eve pardons, Walsh revealed that his office learned Dec. 11 that the president had notes about meetings in which matters relevant to the affair were discussed and "had failed to produce" them to investigators despite years of requests for documents.

Walsh said that the White House was slowly making them available to him but that portions of the diary are still being withheld and he is still missing "months" of notes.

Fitzwater said he had no knowledge of what was in Bush's notes but said that the request for them had come only when Walsh's prosecutors were getting ready for the Weinberger trial, which had been scheduled to begin next month.

"My understanding is that they

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were not asked for until the Weinberger case," he said.

However, James J. Brosnahan, a San Francisco attorney who was prosecuting Weinberger for Walsh, offered a sharply different version. On Dec. 11, he said, an official in the White House legal office had notified Walsh's office "that there were notes that Bush had kept and that they were embarrassed—that they should have been produced before."

"I have to believe that somebody said, 'I'm not going to do this—I'm not going to take these out the back door,' " Brosnahan added. Walsh said Thursday that he does not know why the documents were offered on Dec. 11.

Brosnahan said the typed, dictated notes refer among other things to the period after November 1986, when the Iran-contra affair was publicly disclosed. "They contain his [Bush's] ruminations about the investigation and refer to his disappointment that [former Secretary of State George P.] Shultz made his notes available," he said.

Walsh said Thursday that Bush's withholding of notes constituted "misconduct" and would lead to "appropriate action." He said the president is now "the subject of our investigation."

Walsh spokeswoman Mary Belcher said yesterday that the independent counsel's office had specifically requested since 1987 that top Reagan administration officials, including Bush, turn over personal notes, tapes and other records relating to the Iran-contra affair.

She said that this was a standing request and the Dec. 11 notification by the White House was not in response to any new, specific request from Walsh's office.

Thursday, during an interview on ABC News's "Nightline," Walsh said, "I do not understand how such a reservoir of contemporaneous records could be withheld from the Congress and from us, but we will find out."

Fitzwater said he had no information about what Walsh called "missing months" of notes but reiterated that Bush's intention is to make public everything on the matter that is in his possession.

Pardoned along with Weinberger, were former assistant secretary of state Elliott Abrams, former Reagan national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane, and former CIA officials Clair E. George, Alan D. Fiers Jr. and Duane R. "Dewey" Clarridge.

Bush said repeatedly during the recent election campaign that he had disclosed everything he knew about the Iran-contra affair to Walsh's investigators.

On Sept. 15, he told Tom Brokaw of NBC News that he had "nothing to explain."

"I've given every bit of evidence I have to these thousands of investigators. And nobody has suggested that I've done anything wrong at all," he said.

In his 1987 autobiography, Bush wrote that, as vice president, he knew little about the Iran-contra affair while it was taking place in 1985 and 1986.

His "first real chance to see the picture as a whole" did not come until December 1986, he wrote, when he was "briefed" by Sen. Dave Durenberger (R-Minn.), then chairman of the Senate intelligence committee. At that point, the Reagan administration's secret arms deals with Iran and its illegal support of the Nicaraguan contras in Central America had been exposed.

"What Dave had to say left me with the feeling, expressed to my chief of staff Craig Fuller, that I'd been deliberately excluded from key meetings involving details of the Iran operation," Bush wrote.

Subsequent investigations showed, however, that Bush had more knowledge than suggested by that comment.

Former national security adviser John M. Poindexter testified that Bush was usually at Poindexter's late-morning briefings of President Ronald Reagan. According to the notes of then-Defense Secretary Weinberger, Bush was at the top-level January 1986 meeting at which Shultz and Weinberger forcefully expressed their opposition to the arms deals with Iran.

Weinberger's notes make clear that the plan was to trade 4,000 TOW anti-tank missiles for five U.S. hostages—thus establishing an "arms-for-hostages" connection that

Bush has maintained he knew nothing about until late 1986.

Bush received a 25-minute briefing on the progress of the secret Iran operation—then still withheld from Congress—during a visit to the Middle East in July 1986. Israeli anti-terrorist adviser Amiram Nir told Bush that a new channel had been opened with another politically influential group in Iran, Fuller's notes of the meeting show.

Nir described the quandary—whether to press for release of the hostages before delivering the weapons sought by the Iranians. Bush listened but apparently said nothing.

Bush has repeatedly asserted that he knew nothing of the secret U.S. operation to resupply the Nicaraguan contras until late 1986.

Donald P. Gregg, Bush's national security adviser when Bush was vice president, introduced former CIA operative Felix Rodriguez to National Security Council aide Oliver L. North in 1985. North directed the secret, illegal U.S. support for the contras after Congress banned such assistance, and Rodriguez went to work for him.

Bush met Rodriguez on three occasions in 1985 and 1986. But Rodriguez has denied that the secret contra resupply operation was discussed, and Gregg has denied that he knew anything about North's operation until the summer of 1986, and did not inform Bush even then.